CULTURE BRIGHT:

A WINTER ESSAY SERIES

Reflections on art, culture, and the future *of the Quad Cities from* ***Linda Bowers,*** *Board Chair of The Cultural Trust.*

The Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round



"Two miles on the road marked a much larger step for an organization built to connect people and plants."

Nice ride. Cool wheels. Saaaweet! Hot trip.

Corvette? Camaro? GTO? Nope. The Quad City Botanical Center's very own Plant Discovery Bus.

This particular ride carries an idea central to the Center's mission: bringing people and plants together in fun and meaningful ways.

Executive Director Ryan Wille and the QCBC team wanted to reach people who had yet to discover the gardens.

A botanical center can inspire children who walk through its gates. Reaching children in their own neighborhoods and learning spaces requires a different approach.

The answer was a classroom with wheels.

The idea grew from the Center's planning for greater access and broader outreach. Ryan, the team, board members, and community partners considered how the gardens could serve more people and remove barriers to participation.

Some work happened on-site. New paths improved wheelchair access. The Children's Garden gained safety features and imagination stations.

The Plant Discovery Bus would carry the mission farther.

Finding a vehicle was the first challenge. Ryan worked with the Illinois Department of Transportation and MetroLINK to secure a retired minibus for one dollar.

One dollar sounds like the whole story. It was only the beginning.

The vehicle needed to be made road-safe, licensed, and transformed into a mobile classroom. A local design firm covered the exterior with colorful flora and fauna, announcing its purpose before a student ever stepped aboard.

Ryan and Jen Lewis-Snyder, president and CEO of The Cultural Trust, raised funds for the bus, its maintenance, and educational staff.

Their support mattered because a mobile classroom needs people, materials, and the ability to keep showing up.

Fuel must go in the tank. Equipment needs care. Someone has to prepare the lesson, welcome students, and help a child look closely enough to notice something new.

Those expenses turned an idea into a program a community can use.

In 2024, the bus made its two-mile maiden trip to the Martin Luther King Center for its first educational outreach.

Two miles on the road marked a much larger step for an organization built to connect people and plants.

Schools across Rock Island and Scott Counties began requesting visits, with demand extending two years into the future.

Every stop carries the same invitation as the gardens do: come closer, look carefully, and learn about what grows around you.

A lesson can start wherever the bus pulls up.

A child can begin that relationship close to home, then carry the curiosity into a future garden visit.

For readers following our Winter Lights stories, the bus offers another view of the organization behind the display.

The team welcoming families beneath the lights also brings plant education into the community throughout the year. Both experiences serve the same mission, giving people a reason to look closer and connect.

The Cultural Trust's continuing investment supports that organization and its capacity to keep serving people beyond a single season.

Nice ride. Cool wheels. A classroom on the move.

Learn more about QCBC and the Plant Discovery Bus at theculturaltrust.org.

Learn more about Winter Lights at CultureBright.org.

Culture Matters Here.
And it always will.

A Winter Essay Series, presented by The Cultural Trust

To learn more about the Culture Bright Winter Series go to CultureBright.org.

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